

Strike Anywhere

Marnie Slater

"If there occurs an emergency at night it may take some time to make a light to light a lamp. But an ingenious man devised the system of impregnating little sticks of pinewood with sulfur and storing them ready for use. At the slightest touch of fire they burst into flame."

Records of the Unworldly and the Strange written by Chinese author Tao Gu in about 950.

Fut ha Fut ha Fut ha Fut ha Fut ha Fut ha Fphoooh.

An emergency may create binaries. Light - Dark, Inside - Outside, Me - You, Dangerous - Safe, Closed - Open, Mine - Yours, Public - Private, Intact - Destroyed, Stupid - Smart, Poor - Rich. Like a carefully balanced network of dominoes disrupted, each emergency topples and splits a moment in two, and again splits in two and again and again in two. That I do not know, for example, the desiring and hungry qualities of darkness until I realise there is something present that is mine to see. Try and describe to me what it is that you wanted that day: the moment you went from walking to running.

Fut ha Fut ha Fut ha Fut ha Fut ha Fut ha Fphoooh.

An emergency may bring to light. Faced with the need to illuminate, in that instant what will you see? Me? You? Might you see my intentions, understand what I want? Me there, you there? Us here. We are partners now, in this emergency. And even indications of my motivations, my desires? Now the streets are bright, details imagined now rendered clear and beating (our hearts, our breath). We thought the mystery was going to be over, with the light and everything visible and stuff, and in a sense it is, the facts are established, a ground identified, we are now materials. The emergency spurred action, that action light, and that light waits with its volatile potential caught in our throats. You cannot rehearse for an emergency because there are no spectators here (material, human, architectural, or otherwise), there only durational affect-tators.

Fut ha Fut ha Fut ha Fut ha Fut ha Fut ha Fphoooh.

An emergency may alter surfaces. Did you see those buildings before? Their dimensions, colours, surfaces? Emergencies twitch and shake, momentarily flinging things to touch each other, brick against skin, tar to brush to wall, phosphorus to pine, words to ears to eyes. Did you know before now the maximum extension of your limbs? With your left foot here, mine there, shake shake shake shimmy spray. Just as a comma figures breath, a brush may become expired. You need to know this because, in *our* emergency, it will be a coordination of voice that emits from the inhale and exhale of your gestures, your bucket and your brush.

An emergency may ignite relationships. The story of the match is one of emergency, necessity, slavery, invention, control, commerce, women's rights: all lit up for a moment. Until your fingers get hot.

Fut ha Fut ha Fut ha Fut ha Fut ha Fut ha Fphoooh.

The strike anywhere match, made immortal in the heyday of Hollywood's smoking, is a match that can be ignited through swift contact with any textured surface: a shoe, a wall, a pavement. What we understand as two partnered things, the match and the matchbox, are mixed and applied as one. Banned in the West from everything but trampers' emergency kits, these fire-objects seek unlikely, unusual, and durational circumstances of activation. See that building? It is a matchbox. See the sole of my shoe? It is a matchbox.

I talk of this (match, light, action) not as a metaphor, but as an intertwined analogy for a critical moment that has been called a classroom or theatre or writing, but could also be felt as an emergency.